Health Risk Appraisal of Naval Special Forces Personnel

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The Department of the Navy lacks the baseline epidemiological and health data needed to adequately assess and track the health status of naval Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel. These baseline data are needed to appropriately anticipate and plan for personnel health care needs. Currently, there is little information on the effects of U.S. Navy Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) training programs and missions on the acute and chronic physiological and psychological health of these individuals.

In this project, we will gather baseline health and health risk factor data on active duty, reserve, and retired naval SOF personnel. We will identify any aspects of SOF training and missions that are significantly related to injuries, disease, and death, and suggest approaches to minimizing or eliminating those factors. The study will also provide quantitative and qualitative data that can be compared to other population databases to identify health risk factors unique to naval SOF personnel. Working with the office of the COMNAVSPECWARCOM Force Medical Officer, 2,000 active duty and 4,000 reserve and retired naval SOF personnel will be surveyed. The retired SOF personnel will be surveyed by working through existing SOF fraternal organizations. The study will use the Healthier People: Health Risk Appraisal software and services developed by the Carter Center of Emory University in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control. The survey will be customized to include questions unique to the SOF environment. The Health Risk Appraisal (HRA) is a self-administered instrument that will be 4-7 pages in length and will include questions on the health and health history of the individual.

The survey should identify the contributions of unique SOF operational environments to the health risk factors of the SEALs. The SOF results will be compared to databases of 26 U.S. health agencies. Group and individual reports will be published that summarize and interpret the data, identify health risk factors, and provide suggested lifestyle changes needed to reduce risks. The results of the study should benefit the SEALs, their units, and the Navy, and improve quality of life for those no longer on active duty.